United Nations A/55/PV.1

General Assembly

Official Records

Fifty-fifth session

1st plenary meeting
Tuesday, 5 September 2000, 3 p.m.
New York

Temporary President: Mr. Gurirab ..... (Namibia)

The meeting was called to order at 3.20 p.m.

Item 1 of the provisional agenda

Opening of the session by the Chairman of the delegation of Namibia

The Temporary President: I declare open the fifty-fifth regular session of the General Assembly.

Item 2 of the provisional agenda

Minute of silent prayer or meditation

The Temporary President: Before calling on representatives to observe a minute of silent prayer or meditation in accordance with rule 62 of the rules of procedure, I propose that as we do so we also observe the International Day of Peace on this, the opening day of the fifty-fifth regular session of the General Assembly, as proclaimed by the General Assembly in its resolutions 36/67 of 30 November 1981 and 52/232 of 4 June 1998, to be devoted to commemorating and strengthening the ideals of peace both within and among all nations and peoples.

I now invite representatives to stand and observe one minute of silent prayer or meditation.

The members of the General Assembly observed a minute of silent prayer or meditation.

Item 124 of the provisional agenda

Scale of assessments for the apportionment of the expenses of the United Nations (A/55/345)

The Temporary President: Before turning to the other items on our agenda, I should like, in keeping with the established practice, to invite the attention of the General Assembly to document A/55/345, which has been circulated in the General Assembly Hall this afternoon. It contains a letter from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the General Assembly, in which he informs the Assembly that 26 Member States are in arrears in the payment of their financial contributions to the United Nations within the terms of Article 19 of the Charter.

I should like to remind delegations that, under Article 19 of the Charter,

> "A Member of the United Nations which is in arrears in the payment of its financial contributions to the Organization shall have no vote in the General Assembly if the amount of its arrears equals or exceeds the amount of the contributions due from it for the preceding two full years."

May I take it that the General Assembly duly takes note of the information contained in documents A/55/345?

It was so decided.

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-178. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

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The Temporary President: I should also like to inform members that, since the issuance of document A/55/345, Rwanda and Togo have made the necessary payments to reduce their arrears below the amount specified in Article 19 of the Charter.

May I take it that the General Assembly duly takes note of this information?

It was so decided.

The Temporary President: This information will be reflected in an addendum to document A/55/345, to be issued.

Item 3 of the provisional agenda

Credentials of representatives to the fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly

(a) Appointment of the members of the Credentials Committee

The Temporary President: Rule 28 of the rules of procedure provides that the General Assembly at the beginning of each session shall appoint, on the proposal of the President, a Credentials Committee consisting of nine members.

Accordingly, it is proposed that, for the fifty-fifth session, the Credentials Committee should consist of the following Member States: Bahamas, China, Ecuador, Gabon, Ireland, Mauritius, the Russian Federation, Thailand and the United States of America.

May I take it that the States I have mentioned are hereby appointed members of the Credentials Committee?

It was so decided.

Item 4 of the provisional agenda

Election of the President of the General Assembly

The Temporary President: I now invite members of the General Assembly to proceed to the election of the President of the General Assembly at its fifty-fifth session.

May I recall that, in accordance with paragraph 1 of the annex to General Assembly resolution 33/138, the President of the General Assembly at the fifty-fifth session should be elected from among the Western European and other States.

In this connection, I have been informed by the Chairman of the Group of Western European and other States that the group has endorsed the candidacy of His Excellency Mr. Harri Holkeri of Finland for the presidency of the General Assembly.

Taking into account the provisions of paragraph 16 of annex VI to the rules of procedure, I therefore declare His Excellency Mr. Harri Holkeri of Finland elected by acclamation President of the General Assembly at its fifty-fifth session.

I extend my sincere congratulations to His Excellency Mr. Harri Holkeri and I invite him to assume the presidency.

I request the Chief of Protocol to escort the President to the podium.

Mr. Harri Holkeri took the Chair.

Address by Mr. Harri Holkeri, President of the General Assembly at its fifty-fifth session

The President: I am deeply grateful for the trust and confidence in my country and myself that this election represents. I will do my best to live up to the honour of having been elected President of the fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly. Let me assure each and every person here that as of today, I am the President of the membership as a whole.

The fact that this session of the General Assembly has been designated the Millennium Assembly of the United Nations makes this privilege of serving the Member States particularly momentous. This week's Millennium Summit will bring together a record number of Heads of State or Government. Co-chaired by Presidents Tarja Halonen of Finland and Sam Nujoma of Namibia, the Summit is a unique, symbolic moment. The Summit Declaration will capture the common vision of the Member States at that moment. It will guide our work not only during the Millennium Assembly but for years to come.

I am profoundly grateful to my most esteemed predecessor, Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab, President of the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly, for his tireless work to pave the way for a successful Millennium Summit and Assembly. I wish him well in all his endeavours as he continues to serve his people as the Foreign Minister of Namibia.

I also wish to salute the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for having once again shown leadership, courage and vision. His report entitled "We the peoples" (A/54/2000) laid an indispensable foundation for the work of the Summit. It has also set for us new standards in clarity of purpose, relevance and readability.

As I thank all Member States for their confidence and trust, I am particularly thankful for the endorsement of the Western European and other States Group. For Finland, this presidency comes after almost 45 years of membership in the United Nations. Over the past decades, Finland and Finns have been given the opportunity to serve the United Nations in a number of ways. Now it is my turn to serve the Organization and its General Assembly, the chief deliberative, policy-making and representative organ of the United Nations.

The Organization has been — and still is — one of the cornerstones of Finnish foreign policy. Finland is committed to multilateralism in the advancement of the purposes and principles of the United Nations, as enshrined in the Charter. For my country, multilateralism is therefore a means to promote greater social equality, democracy and human rights — and, in particular, the rights of women and girls. It is these goals and the overall goals of sustainable human development, alleviation of poverty and combating global environmental threats that are also central to Finnish development cooperation.

In the spirit of multilateralism, Finland has also participated actively in United Nations peacekeeping from the Suez to South Lebanon to the Balkans. Since the 1950s, thousands of Finnish men and women have served with devotion to support United Nations efforts to maintain peace and security.

This week's Millennium Summit and its Declaration will provide an enormous momentum which will reinforce the implementation of the global agenda and its development targets, as defined in the global conferences of the 1990s. The Declaration will constitute an authoritative mandate for our work and for my presidency.

On the agenda before us, there is one issue which is particularly close to my heart. This is primary and secondary education, particularly for girls. Education is a key element in the global economy, and we should implement our commitments in this regard.

It will be the responsibility of the General Assembly to heed the moment and put into practice the political commitment of our Heads of State or Government. The General Assembly and its Main Committees must show leadership to the rest of the United Nations system and must reflect the results of the Summit in their work. We need to avoid a business-as-usual mentality.

It is also vital that we start without delay the consideration of the recommendations of the report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations.

We must make every effort to make new technology available to all at low cost. I believe that information and communication technology presents a true opportunity for development, be it for reducing poverty, improving education or combating HIV/AIDS and other infectious diseases. It can help us better understand climate change and other environmental challenges, and even plan better neighbourhoods in place of slums. In other words, it facilitates reaching the concrete goals which are part of the upcoming Summit Declaration.

For the General Assembly, all this is an immense task. Let me now dwell on how we can accomplish it. This involves reaching out to the wider world for cooperation, increasing the transparency of the General Assembly and improving its effectiveness.

As for the Organization's outreach towards wider civil society, it is closely related to the overall relevance of the United Nations. This is a challenge the United Nations can either accept and grow with or shy away from and stop growing. The norm should be dialogue and inclusion. The emergence of a strong and viable global network of non-governmental organizations is a fact. We all know that their work is indispensable and that it complements the role of the United Nations in many fields. This was evidenced most recently in the Millennium Forum; I hope that Governments will take time to reflect on the outcome of that Forum.

The private sector is part of civil society. The United Nations is currently exploring new ways to cooperate with the private sector so as to assure that it takes due note of our work and standards for mutual benefit. In this regard, I would like to express my support for the recent initiatives of the Secretary-General.

Furthermore, our goal must be to enhance the understanding, collaboration and complementarity of activities between the United Nations and the international financial institutions.

To be effective, and to get due credit, the General Assembly must work in a transparent and understandable manner. In order not to become a hermit kingdom, understood only by United Nations experts, the General Assembly must be able to explain why its work is relevant to the outside world. As President, my aim is to work in an open way. That will also be one of my requests to the Chairpersons of the Main Committees and to the Secretariat.

I strongly believe that in order to add value and make a difference, the General Assembly must address, in a focused, meaningful and timely manner, the challenges of rapid change and globalization. In doing so, it must respond to the current priorities of its Member States. This requires courage to look back at the original legislative intent of the General Assembly and at how that can be best reflected in the practical work of the Organization today.

Yet the General Assembly is not only about specific mandates and accomplishments. To engage in a dialogue on an equal basis, the global community needs the General Assembly. Between nations, even the most expensive dialogue is immeasurably cheaper than the cheapest armed conflict. The power of dialogue in the service of development is well demonstrated by the goals agreed upon by the global conferences of the 1990s.

As in any parliament, there is bound to be a certain degree of partisanship and political manoeuvring in the General Assembly. After all, there are genuine differences in Member States' interests and world views. However, the General Assembly can lose its effectiveness if this turns into a stifling bloc mentality and an us-versus-them mindset. During this Millennium Assembly, I plead with Member States to work in the spirit of partnership and solidarity.

As I see the role of the President of the General Assembly, it is one of facilitator, conciliator and consensus-builder. He must lead — and I will do so — but without the membership on board, that leadership will ultimately fail. During this General Assembly session, we will have to make hard and at times unpleasant decisions. These decisions require a spirit of dialogue and inclusion from all of us.

I will make every effort to guide the work of the Assembly in an effective manner. I harbour no illusions about quick solutions. I believe it is often the practical and small things which count and ultimately add up to a change. One such step will be to always start the plenary meetings of the Assembly on time. I trust that the Chairpersons of the Main Committees will commit themselves to the same practice at the committee level. This is not only about sensible use of our common resources; it is the least we can do to show respect and courtesy towards one another.

I will also seek close and regular dialogue with the Chairpersons and Bureaux of the Main Committees, as well as with the Secretariat. The six Chairpersons that we are about to elect are very much the backbone of the daily work of the General Assembly. I also intend to maintain regular contacts with the Presidents of the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council.

As for the Secretariat, it provides an indispensable partner without which our work would stall. I salute the staff members of the Organization — at Headquarters as well as in the field — for their dedication, commitment and hard work. I would like to pay special tribute to those staff members who, even at this moment, put their lives in danger in the service of this Organization.

I believe in people and I believe in the United Nations. I am convinced that we can live in peace and harmony, because the power of common values and goals exceeds our differences. Our strength lies in the diversity of humankind and in our different backgrounds, skills, and knowledge. As a father and grandfather, I dream of a better world for my children and theirs.

During my tenure, I will do my best to serve the United Nations and all its Member States. In this task, I need your support and assistance. I would like to invite everyone to work together during this Millennium Assembly. Let us not be afraid of the difficulties and uncertainties ahead. Instead, let us build on cooperation, mutual understanding, and trust.

I thank you for your attention.

Item 19 of the provisional agenda

Admission of new Members to the United Nations

Application for admission (A/54/699)

Letter from the President of the Security Council (A/54/758)

Draft resolution (A/55/L.1)

The President: In accordance with the procedure followed in the past, I should now like to invite the General Assembly to consider, under item 19 of the provisional agenda entitled "Admission of new Members to the United Nations", the positive recommendation by the Security Council for the admission to membership in the United Nations of Tuvalu.

This special procedure has been applied previously in order to give States recommended by the Security Council for membership in our Organization the opportunity, if the General Assembly acts favourably on their requests, to participate from the outset in the work of the session.

If there is no objection, we shall proceed accordingly.

It was so decided.

The President: The Security Council has recommended the admission of Tuvalu to membership in the United Nations, as stated in document A/54/758. In this connection, a draft resolution has been submitted in document A/55/L.1.

Before proceeding to take action on the draft resolution, I should like to announce that since its introduction the following countries have become sponsors of draft resolution A/55/L.1: Brazil, Burkina Faso, Cyprus, Denmark, Germany, India, Israel, Japan, Slovenia, the Syrian Arab Republic and Trinidad and Tobago.

May I take it that the General Assembly accepts the recommendation of the Security Council and adopts the draft resolution by acclamation?

Draft resolution A/55/L.1 was adopted (resolution 55/1).

The President: I therefore declare Tuvalu admitted to membership in the United Nations.

It is my pleasure on this historic occasion to welcome, on behalf of the General Assembly, Tuvalu as a full Member of the United Nations. I congratulate Tuvalu and the United Nations on the admission of its 189th Member State.

I am confident that this newly admitted Member State will contribute to the General Assembly and to the United Nations efforts in addressing the issues in international relations that lie ahead.

I wish the Government and the people of Tuvalu peace, prosperity, happiness and every success for the future. I wish to assure Tuvalu of the full support of the United Nations as it takes its rightful place in the international community as a free, independent, sovereign and peace-loving State.

I now give the floor to the representative of Kenya, who will speak on behalf of the Group of African States.

Mr. Kahende (Kenya): I wish first to take this opportunity to congratulate His Excellency Mr. Harri Holkeri upon his assumption of the high office of President of the General Assembly at its fifty-fifth session. I thank him for the commitment he made in his statement to serve mankind effectively during his tenure of office through contacts and dialogue. My delegation has no doubt, and Africa has no doubt, that the Millennium Summit, which kicks off tomorrow, will pose a most challenging start to that promise. We assure him of Africa's total support and assistance.

Allow me at the same time to thank an illustrious son of Africa, The Honourable Theo-Ben Gurirab for the excellent job he did in the discharge of his duties during the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly.

Turning to the duty that has brought me before the Assembly, Kenya, in its capacity as the Chairman of the African Group for the month of September, and, indeed, on its own behalf, takes this opportunity to congratulate Tuvalu upon joining the United Nations as the 189th Member of our Organization.

Indeed, the family of United Nations is now inching closer to the fulfilment of one of the key principles of our Organization: the recognition of the value of the independence of all peoples. Africa pledges its fullest cooperation to Tuvalu as it begins to discharge its international obligations.

The President: I now call on the representative of Japan, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Asian States.

Mr. Satoh (Japan): It is a great pleasure, honour and privilege for me to address the General Assembly, on behalf of all the Member States of the Asian Group, at the opening of its fifty-fifth session. I would like to offer to you, Mr. President, the warmest congratulations of the Asian Group on your election as President of this body. I am confident that, with the benefit of your able leadership and wide-ranging experience, the General Assembly will respond wisely and effectively to the needs and expectations of the international community during this historic Millennium Assembly. You may rest assured of the full support and cooperation of the Member States of the Asian Group as you carry out the responsibilities of your high office.

I would also like to express the profound appreciation of the Asian Group to the outgoing President, His Excellency Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab. Thanks to his excellent guidance and dedicated efforts throughout the fifty-fourth session, we were able to make significant progress in addressing the challenges facing the international community. We are also grateful for his admirable leadership and inexhaustible patience in smoothly preparing for the historic Millennium Summit. We are confident that his valuable contributions will ensure the success of the Millennium Summit.

It is my particular pleasure to congratulate Tuvalu on its admission to the United Nations. On behalf of all the Member States of the Asian Group, as well as of my own country, Japan, I would like to extend the warmest welcome to this newest Member of the Organization.

The admission of Tuvalu to the family of nations is of great significance, as it strengthens the universality of the United Nations and thus enhances its legitimacy and effectiveness. The addition of Tuvalu to United Nations membership is yet another reminder of the importance of focusing greater attention on the problems facing small island developing States.

We, the Member States of the Asian Group, extend our best wishes to the Government and the people of Tuvalu on this landmark occasion in their country's history. We all look forward to working closely with Tuvalu in pursuing the goals and objectives enshrined in the United Nations Charter.

The President: I now call on the representative of the Russian Federation, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Eastern European States.

Mr. Gatilov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): It is my privilege and honour to address the General Assembly at its fifty-fifth session on behalf of the Group of Eastern European States.

At the outset, I would like to congratulate you, Sir, on your election as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-fifth session. Our gratitude goes to the outgoing President, His Excellency Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab.

On behalf of the Eastern European States, I have the great honour of expressing our congratulations to Tuvalu on the historic occasion of its admission to membership in the United Nations. We note with great satisfaction Tuvalu's solemn commitment to uphold the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and to fulfil all the obligations contained therein. Today, Tuvalu has joined us as a full-fledged Member of the United Nations, and we are prepared to work closely with its representatives.

In the light of the advent of the new millennium, which affords us an opportunity to reflect on the role of the United Nations in the twenty-first century, we find it particularly symbolic that the family of peace-loving nations has been joined by yet another Member. We hope that the participation of Tuvalu in the Organization will benefit all Members as we work to address pressing challenges that fall within the ambit of the United Nations.

Once again, on behalf of the Group of Eastern European States, I would like to convey to the delegation of Tuvalu and to all the people of that country, our most heartfelt welcome to the United Nations.

The President: I now call on the representative of Sweden, who will speak on behalf of Group of Western European and other States.

Mr. Schori (Sweden): First of all, allow me to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your election as President of the fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly, and to pledge to you the full support of the Group of Western European and other States.

I would also like to express our heartfelt thanks for the impressive leadership demonstrated by Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab, the Foreign Minister of Namibia, during the previous session.

I am honoured to take the floor on behalf of the Group of Western European and other States to congratulate and welcome Tuvalu as a new Member State of the United Nations. I would like to pay special respect to the Head of Government of Tuvalu, who is present here on this historic day for his country.

The admission of new Member States always constitutes an event for the Organization. The United Nations is a truly unique Organization of sovereign States based on the principle of mutual respect and the equality of all its Members, regardless of geometrical dimension or population. Each new Member State brings to this forum its own characteristics, history and culture, which enriches the family of nations.

The new Member State and its people have faced great challenges in coping with the elements of nature. We have no doubt that this new Member will participate actively and strengthen the South Pacific perspective in the work of our Organization, and at the same time provide for a more secure and prosperous future for its people.

We, the members of the Group of Western European and other States, look forward to developing a close working relationship and friendship with the representatives of Tuvalu.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the United States of America, who will speak on behalf of the host country.

Ms. King (United States of America): In my capacity as representative of the host country, I would like to extend warm congratulations to Tuvalu as it becomes a Member of the United Nations on this historic day. The adoption by the General Assembly of a resolution admitting this newest Member State to the United Nations recognizes its sovereignty, its independence and its readiness to take its place in the community of nations.

As we work to advance the goals of a peaceful and prosperous international community, I am sure that Tuvalu's participation in the United Nations will benefit all Members. I look forward to working with the representatives of Tuvalu, whom I trust will bring a fresh perspective to the work of the Organization.

Once again, on behalf of the United States, I would like to convey to Prime Minister Ionatana Ionatana and his delegation, who are here with us today, our most heartfelt welcome to the United Nations.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Federated States of Micronesia, who will speak on behalf of the members of the South Pacific Forum.

Mr. Nakayama (Federated States of Micronesia): I have the honour to address the fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly and to make this statement on behalf of the following South Pacific countries that are Members of this body: Australia, my own country, the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of the Fiji Islands, Kiribati, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, Nauru, New Zealand, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Samoa, Tonga and Vanuatu.

Let me, however, at the very outset offer the warm congratulations of the South Pacific Group to you, Mr. President, on your election to guide the fifty-fifth session of this body at this historic opening of a new millennium. With your leadership and wide-ranging experience, we are confident that this session of the General Assembly will deal effectively with the many important and monumental tasks facing the Assembly. I assure you of the full support and best wishes of the South Pacific Group as you carry out the task of your high office.

Let me also extend our most profound appreciation to outgoing President Theo-Ben Gurirab, whose dedicated efforts guided the fifty-fourth session of the Assembly to a successful conclusion. His untiring efforts have smoothly paved the way for the Millennium Assembly, and prepared us for the Millennium Summit.

We welcome the adoption by the Assembly of the resolution admitting another Member to our ranks. This resolution is of particular significance to the South Pacific Group, as this new Member of the United Nations family, the small island State of Tuvalu, is truly one of our own and a sister island member of our Pacific Forum, to which the South Pacific Group here at the United Nations belongs.

While we extend our best wishes and congratulations to the Government and people of Tuvalu and celebrate with them on this momentous

occasion in their history, the South Pacific Group would like to state its sincere appreciation to the United Nations Security Council for its wise decision to recommend the admission of Tuvalu to membership in this body. Our heartfelt appreciation also goes out to the many members of the Organization who have also joined in co-sponsoring and supporting the resolution on Tuvalu's admission to the United Nations.

This is the second time in a row that a new Member of the Organization comes from the ranks of small island developing States. Last year, the Assembly admitted the three Pacific small island developing States of Kiribati, Nauru and Tonga. And today, Tuvalu, another small island country from the Pacific, is being admitted. While today's admission of another small island country is symbolic and further strengthens the universality of the United Nations, its significance is not totally lost on many of us who share the same vulnerabilities and problems that island countries like Tuvalu face. Our smallness and isolation have not insulated us from the impact of decisions made elsewhere.

We have decided, although with great sacrifices of scarce resources, to join the Organization. We have also decided that we must participate with the rest of the world and contribute constructively in what little way we can to the work of this body. We come to the United Nations with high aspirations and confidence that our participation as Members of this body will further advance the cause of sustainable development for small island developing States. With renewed dedication and commitments by Members of the United Nations, the past efforts of this body will not be lost in the new millennium.

In closing, I wish once again to refer to our joy and humility at being permitted to speak on this occasion as we welcome Tuvalu to membership in the Organization.

Address by Mr. Ionatana Ionatana, Prime Minister of Tuvalu

The President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by the Prime Minister of Tuvalu.

Mr. Ionatana Ionatana, Prime Minister of Tuvalu, was escorted to the rostrum.

The President: I have great pleasure in welcoming the Prime Minister of Tuvalu, The Honourable Mr. Ionatana Ionatana, and inviting him to address the Assembly.

Mr. Ionatana (Tuvalu): On behalf of the people of Tuvalu, allow me first to extend a warm greeting of friendship to the General Assembly at its fifty-fifth session. I congratulate Mr. Harri Holkeri of Finland on his election as President of the General Assembly.

I offer my sincere gratitude for the kind words expressed on behalf of the Groups of African States, Asian States, Eastern European States, Latin American and Caribbean States, Western European and other States, the host country, the United States, and, last but certainly not least, our neighbour States of the Pacific Islands Forum.

I also wish to convey my deepest thanks to our sponsor States, the Security Council and the General Assembly for the honour of being made the 189th State Member of the United Nations.

This is a special day in the history of Tuvalu. To be a Member of the United Nations has made us very proud. To be a Member symbolizes how far we have come since independence. But we are humbled too: humbled because Tuvalu is a small country; humbled because Tuvalu is taking on new obligations; humbled because we are confronting the franchise of the United Nations, which is immense: the promotion of peace and prosperity all over the world. In accordance with our faith, I want to give thanks to Almighty God — the God of Tuvalu and of all nations — for providing his guidance to Tuvalu and the United Nations as a whole.

Tuvalu was once a British colony, part of the then Gilbert and Ellice Islands. Tuvalu came under British jurisdiction in 1877. A British protectorate was named in 1892, with colony status conferred in 1916. In 1975, the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony was decoupled. The Ellice Islands became Tuvalu. A traditional name, the word Tuvalu means "eight islands standing together", in reference to the land on which we have lived for centuries.

On 1 October 1978, Tuvalu celebrated its independence. At the time, many observers said Tuvalu statehood was a false promise. Tuvalu's future was described as bleak. The country had problems too enormous to overcome. It was too remote, too small, too poor. Today, as we stand here in the General

Assembly, it would appear that those who doubted the worthiness of Tuvalu statehood have been proven wrong.

Tuvalu has a rich culture, a deep faith in Christianity and a high respect for education. All three things — culture, faith and education — are the foundations of modern Tuvalu. But by no means have we struggled alone. Our life under British colonial administration taught us a great deal. Most importantly, we learned how to run a Government and build a public service. In the years since, we have benefited from a seemingly endless supply of support and goodwill from the international community. This has produced a lasting legacy of development, for which we are eternally grateful.

In the last two decades, Tuvalu has steadily matured politically and economically. We are now committing our own resources to development, including and especially education. Tuvalu's private sector is small but growing. National infrastructure is gradually expanding. Ultimately, our goal is to eliminate foreign aid. In that regard, we recognize the critical role information technology will play in the twenty-first century. As remote as we are, the Internet has brought the world to our doorstep, and in return Tuvalu is spreading its country domain name, .TV, around the world.

By any measure, the twentieth century was a remarkable journey for the people of Tuvalu. In the span of just a few generations, we emerged from eight tiny islands in the Pacific Ocean, little known to the outside world. Traditionally, we are fishermen, planters and traders. We lead simple lives that meet our basic needs. As we have progressed, we have taken on occupations in fields new to us, such as electrical engineering and computer science. We have adopted new sources of energy, new forms of communication, a new legal system and the Westminster model of democratic government. Today, we start a new occupation in the United Nations as our journey continues into the twenty-first century.

The culture of Tuvalu is guided by the principles of courtesy and the search for consensus, rather than confrontation and divisiveness. We are careful to balance the assertion of individual rights with the needs of the community. This is our tradition. We believe that these basic principles also rest at the heart of the United Nations. The principles of courtesy, consensus and respect for others will be the foundation of our presence here in the General Assembly.

The United Nations, through its vast array of specialized agencies, has been a generous supporter of Tuvalu. Since our independence, the United Nations has helped Tuvalu in areas as diverse as public health, public sector reform, private enterprise, agriculture, education, fisheries, trade, handicrafts, medicine and water — the list goes on. I might add that recent United Nations reforms, which have made it more attractive for smaller States to join the Organization, was a turning point in our decision to apply for membership. Our relationship with the United Nations is now deeper than ever before and, because of that, Tuvalu's place in the world is more secure than ever.

Tuvalu is a growing participant in regional and international affairs. We are a party to numerous United Nations conventions. We are active members of many regional and international bodies, including a number of United Nations agencies. We are a member of the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States in partnership with the European Union. Last Friday, 1 September, Tuvalu became a full member of the Commonwealth.

In Tuvalu, we are concerned about liberalized trade and increasing globalization. On the one hand, we recognize the long-term benefits of free trade, especially on a global scale; on the other, economic globalization has enormous force, over which we have little control or influence. We would be alarmed if a side effect of globalization eroded our customs and undermined our culture. Because Tuvalu is small, the risk we face is great, but Tuvalu owes its survival to itself and for that we owe our ancestors an unrepayable debt.

We are also concerned about global climate change and the consequences of atmospheric warming, in particular rising sea levels. Worldwide, carbon dioxide emissions are still increasing. Emission targets are not being met. We urge the Members of the United Nations family, in accordance with the Kyoto Protocol, to combat this threat more aggressively before it is too late. As members of the Assembly know, we in the Pacific are especially vulnerable. We live on small islands, and on small islands, land is priceless. Losing it as a result of rising sea levels would be a tragic, irreplaceable loss.

The Pacific islands are not always peaceful, but the world is not a perfect place. Often, the ripples from a political event reach across the Pacific region. As in many of our neighbour States, exposure to such events, even indirect exposure, can mean that stability and security are put at risk. In times of political instability, what the region needs most is international support aimed at conciliation and economic recovery. This benefits not just one country, but all Pacific island States. The challenges facing the Pacific are those not of the Forum family only, but of the international community at large, for we all share a common interest in community stability and security.

We know what a privilege it is to be standing in the General Assembly Hall as an equal Member, despite our small population, economy and geographic size, but I like to think that we have earned our place.

Tuvalu has embarked on a new voyage. Our entry into the United Nations is a message of hope for our people. We are confident that the United Nations will steer us safely through unfamiliar waters so that we can achieve our goals and expectations. May God be with us on our journey. May God bless the United Nations and may God bless the hopes and dreams of Tuvalu. Tuvalu for God, God for Tuvalu.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister of Tuvalu for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Ionatana, Prime Minister of Tuvalu, was escorted from the rostrum.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Barbados, Her Excellency Miss June Yvonne Clarke, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States.

Miss Clarke (Barbados): I count it an honour and a privilege to be able to address the General Assembly on the occasion of the opening of the fifty-fifth session. Even as I take this opportunity to extend my warmest congratulations to you, Mr. President, as you take up the reins of leadership of this Assembly, I must also apologize for my late arrival. Regrettably, this is part of the great security activity which is going on and which necessitated my going from one gate to another on the long routing. So please accept my apologies.

The Barbados delegation, on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States (GRULAC), has the honour to congratulate and welcome Tuvalu on the occasion of its admission into the family of nations, the United Nations. It is perhaps fitting that Barbados should be chairing GRULAC on this illustrious occasion of the event of the Millennium Assembly in the year 2000 and has the significant honour of welcoming another small island State into the international community, for GRULAC has its full quota of small island developing States. Of the many nations, large and small, powerful and weak, gathered to guide the United Nations into the twenty-first century, the entry of Tuvalu into the United Nations reminds us of the role the Organization must continue to play into the new millennium, insofar as the protection of the vulnerable States of the world and the vulnerable peoples of the world is concerned.

We, the member States of GRULAC, are very familiar with the history and background of Tuvalu, which has emerged from colonialism, as so many of our own member States have done — some in the distant past, some in the not-so-distant past and some in the more recent past. The geography of Tuvalu tells us that one of the world's smallest and most resourceful nations, with 10,000 people and a total land area of 26 square kilometres, encompassing an amazing 1.3 million square kilometres of ocean, is quite a place. History reveals it has been an independent State since 1978 and a member of the former British Commonwealth. Thus, Tuvalu shares with the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) countries that are the smallest members of GRULAC a similar colonial heritage.

As this small island developing State enters the United Nations family, it has a democratic Constitution monarchy, with a 12-member Parliament, elected every five years by universal adult suffrage. It shares with other small island States the problems of creating sustainable growth, maintaining good governance and the protection of its sovereignty in the new globalized world.

At the United Nations, we have monitored the emergence of the nation of Tuvalu from the indecision of their fate as forgotten peoples of the Gilbert and Ellice Islands. Even with few resources, the spirit of independence of Tuvalu could not be denied. After a referendum in 1979, the people of the Ellice Islands voted overwhelmingly to separate from the people of the Gilbert Islands. This separation became effective on 1 October 1978, and Tuvalu became independent.

The small island developing State of Tuvalu has gained membership in the United Nations at a most significant time in the history of this Organization. During this historic Millennium Assembly, the Members of this global community will seek to make the goals and the work of the United Nations more relevant to its Members in these swiftly changing times. Given the overwhelming problems that confront us, Tuvalu's membership as one of the smallest of the United Nations family aptly reminds us that today the goals of the United Nations Charter remain very relevant.

On behalf of the member States of GRULAC, it gives my delegation great pleasure to welcome Tuvalu into our family of nations. We believe, as the Security Council noted in February of this year, that Tuvalu will hold to its commitment to uphold the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter and to fulfil all the obligations contained therein.

The President: I would like to announce that the flag of Tuvalu will be raised at a ceremony which will take place in front of the delegates' entrance immediately following the adjournment of the 2nd plenary meeting this afternoon.

The meeting rose at 4.25 p.m.